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THE CHRISTIAN SOUTH AND NEGRO EDUCATION*

I have unusual hesitancy in speaking to you upon the subject assigned; indeed, the timidity well nigh reached the stage of fright, when two days ago I learned, for the first time, that my feeble voice is to be raised, not only in the hearing of our own distinguished educators, but in that of our right honorable and right distinguished guest,¹ for whose address we are waiting with impatience. Unknown to him, he has been my teacher for many years past, and the man, though he live to be old, is still the boy in the presence of his revered teacher. And then I have felt embarrassed by the magnitude of the subject in its relations to well nigh all the social questions, not simply of the South, but of the entire Nation, and indeed, of the world. The particular form of the title, however, "The Christian South and Negro Education," while legitimately admitting a discussion of the entire "Race Issue," quite as readily allows a contraction of the wider question, and the fixing of our thought upon its most important and its most practical social feature. Thus we may properly eliminate one feature which I am personally most willing to allow others to discuss — the political relation of the races — which is, for the present at least, settled to the satisfaction of all who really know the races and the history which has made their present relations in the South. The social relation of the races we may not eliminate, because it is necessary to the intelligent examination of our topic.

That two races so distinct as the whites and the blacks are could live together in (humanly speaking) perfect relations, closely allied in business and social affairs, loyal in their affections and lavish of sympathy, each implicitly trusting the other as far as trust was deserved, is still a marvel to me, and must be equally so to every student of history. Yet this was the re-

* An address before the Conference for Education in the South, in Memphis, April 23, 1908.

¹ The Hon. James Bryce, the British Ambassador, author of "The American Commonwealth."

lation of the better class of Southern slave owner and slave up to the era of Reconstruction. It was a relation which no one has ever been able to describe, and which could be illustrated only by the rare genius of a few writers, like Thomas Nelson Page, who are fully understood only by those who have had some share in the experiences which they have so delightfully related. It is not possible for us of the South to explain this relation to our brothers of the North, though we are still able to exhibit the fact in rare instances of inherited plantation relationship, if they will come to see us in our country homes. What was once the close and sympathetic relation of races suffered a remarkable change during the period from 1868 to 1880, which resulted in the sundering wide of the two races, while individual friendships and affections between members of the races survived. That such a revolution, such a cataclysm should have occurred without resulting in everlasting hatred between the races is explainable only by the fact that love is stronger than self-interest, and God's divine grace than human passion.

Under the old regime, the master was a shepherd of the plantation flock. He had his motives, of course, but his motives did not destroy the fact of his persistent and devoted care which developed the relationship between himself and his people into one of love and confidence. The old relations were not broken without fearful throes. No one who has been through that nightmare cares to revive it any more. It is now past history and need not be revived save as it throws light upon the present conditions. It is a crime to revive it, save in calm, dispassionate historical temper. The result of the cataclysm was a true social anarchy which settled into, not social hatred, but social separation, distinct and clear-cut.

During that short period between the declaration of emancipation and Reconstruction, the relations were still of the kindest and the closest. There were not lacking both men and women in the South who taught the negroes (as before the war) Christian truth and morality from the pulpit, and (now also) in the school-house the rudiments of learning. But the period of anarchy and destruction put a stop to all this. When the smoke and dust of the frightful period had floated away, and the un-

certainities had gradually been reassured, the races emerged with the conviction that they could not dwell together upon the footing of equality, social or other equality, which had been the fond dream of the negro race, and that there must be clear and distinct separation. That, I maintain, was the only fact settled by the struggle of the period. Just what the relation would be, just how close the tie between the individuals would become; whether the separation would engender a kindly feeling and sympathy, or hate and estrangement — these questions and many more were not settled and are not yet settled, and perhaps cannot be until all the old masters and slaves have gone to their reward, and the younger generations of both races face one another in the glare of the modern light, untinted by the softer hues of the “moon before the war.”

Into this modern period (time is relative, and ancient, mediæval and modern might well be applied to these periods since in them well nigh as much change relatively has been wrought as in those long periods which history makers have invented) the Christian South is now advancing and may not wisely go without its education any more than without its Christianity.

“The Christian South.” A word about it. The South above any other section represents Anglo-Saxon America, native-born America. Scarcely more than a trace of foreign born is to be found in the Southern States. Our people are born into American ideals and conditions and reflect Anglo-Saxon traditions of home and family. That they are Christian (after our human fashion and in the measure of present human ability) no one is better able to attest than a bishop who goes in and out among every class of his fellows. Should this great body of Anglo-Americans ever cease to be Christian, or become less Christian than it is, the effect upon our entire nation would be disastrous beyond the power of thought to conceive. That it should become more and more Christian in thought and practice is not only devoutly to be wished, but is inexpressibly important to the necessarily progressive settlement of the gravest question, in its deep and wide moral effects, before the mind and heart of the American people. The Christian youth has its relation to the negro on the one side and to the balance of this great nation

on the other. If there is any section of our country which must desire the peace and prosperity and happiness of our land, certainly it should be this most American section of it. Is it too much to say that the "race issue" is more vitally intermingled with those essential problems whose solution affects the moral life and therefore the peace, prosperity and happiness of America than any other one issue in social life. And the solution, if it is ever to be worked out at all, is going to be found through the Christian thought and sentiment and the labor of Christian men of science.

I am one of those who believe that God is the God of nations, and that Jesus Christ our Lord is the light as well as the life of man; that no issue is settled without His guidance; that all issues may be settled with it. The real key to the answer of life's problems without is to be found in the solved problems within. The real solution of the vexed and vexing issues of social life is, and always has been, found in the growth of men's minds in the knowledge of God and of God's laws, and of His methods of dealing with life. Whatever the Christian South may do practically, however far short of the ideal she may find it necessary to fall from time to time in meeting practical difficulties, however clouded by political issues this ideal of Christian and democratic relationship of races may be, she cannot blind her eyes to that which the Christ has set, the ideal of a Christian life which expresses itself in work, in forbearance, in unflinching hope.

It is not by accident that the negro is in our midst, that Anglo-Saxon America of to-day has inherited the problem (greater than that of our fathers) of his relation to his white neighbor. It is not by accident that he has learned from the whites the ambition to rise and the inspiration to higher life intellectual and moral. These are the outcome, not of accident, but of Divine Providence. And they constitute one of those opportunities of national life, the issue of which is the Nation's judgment. The more I study the great problem the less able am I to see the end of its progressive solution. Only a few things seem to me to stand out clearly and distinctly above the dust clouds.

First, That the negro is capable of development to a point whose limit I have not yet discovered.

Second, That the vast majority are still children intellectually and little short of savage morally.

Third, That the relation between the races at present, however theoretically estranged, is yet practically and very largely kindly, cordial, and often affectionate — only really disturbed by the astonishingly small class of brutes whose diabolical conduct acts as fire to combustibles.

Fourth, That whatever the future may have in store, the present has the grave duty of making better the generation with which it has to deal, and the certain result of aiding the future solution through the training of more enlightened and moral and responsible characters who will grapple with the problem. No one will be hardy enough to maintain that ignorance is as wise as enlightenment, or that the one is as safe as the other.

Fifth, That no solution of difficulties growing out of the relations of two races is going to be permanent and satisfactory unless both races have made contributions to it. For no arbitrary solution, imposed from without, is either apt to be right, or likely to be tolerated for long.

This brings me to the final consideration for which all that I have said has been preparing — the education of the negro. The only right way to help a race, or an individual (unless he be an invalid or an imbecile), is to help him help himself, and this, in its wide sense, is education. Education does not mean Latin and Greek and mathematics and literature; it does not mean one or all of these things necessarily; it means one or all of these in the measure in which they are found useful or necessary to the edification of him who is being fitted for his life's work. It is conceivable that it may mean none of these things in the education of some exceptional being. But to train the mind to right uses of its powers, that it may do its duty in discriminating absorption of what life and experience offer to it, rejecting the meretricious and assimilating and incorporating the meritorious into its life, and thus to edify the character — this is the business of education. The success, of course, depends largely

upon the discriminating ability of the teacher, who studies his pupil as closely as he does the subjects to be imparted.

I say of this education, of this helping the negro to help himself, that it is the duty of the Christian South (which she has been fulfilling right nobly, too), that it is necessary to the welfare of our land, to the better development of both races, and to their more peaceful relations. Do not misunderstand me; I do not propose education as the solution, and the only solution, of the great problem. I propose it as an auxiliary force in its solution incalculably strong. I propose it as the divine power which is instinct with the religion which God gave to his people in the olden time, and which He immeasurably enlarged in Jesus Christ our Lord, by which He would lead His people out of darkness into light. Religion is in a real sense education, in my thought of it; it presupposes it and requires it as a necessary corollary. And the religion of the Christ, Who is the light of men, is unthinkable without the divine illumination of all God's mysteries, natural and spiritual, human and divine, earthly and heavenly.

Of all the races with whom we come in contact, the negro certainly does not need less than others this education which is to take account of all his faculties, and both of his natures, the natural and the spiritual. The fact that he lives in the midst of enlightenment dooms him the more surely to deterioration unless his faculties be trained. And who can doubt but that his deterioration must drag down the great body of those who are in closest relation to him?

I have entered into such detail as time will permit in my thought about education, because the further question is in mind: if this be the education needed to meet conditions, who is to provide it? It is easily conceivable that the time will come when the development of the choicest spirits among the negroes will provide the prophets of both religion and enlightenment to their race. But I do not believe that any one who knows the race in its present stage of development would venture to say that it is wise to leave it entirely to its own leadership in any department of life. I would not detract one iota from the distinction (which I rejoice in) which any of the great negro lead-

ers have achieved, but, in my judgment, the negroes are not yet ready to emancipate themselves wholly from white guidance and white leadership. The ideal educational work among the race is being done more largely by schools which are under white management and instruction than by those under the control of negroes alone. I am not prepared to say whether or not the work at Tuskegee, for example, is to be compared with that of Hampton, for I do not know enough about it. But there is another and perhaps a deeper reason for my contention for white supervision of negro education. The negro's life must be lived among the whites. The adjustments of life are not always easy to be made. The estrangements would be intolerable if they became extreme to the point of hatred. And, however the better and more cultured class of negroes would express it to themselves, some similar thought is in their minds when they, too, many of them, are anxious that the separation of the races shall not extend to the point of all loss of contact with white teacher or preacher.

The sentiment and practice upon this point differ widely in different States of the South, and in different communities of the same State. In my native State, South Carolina, there are not a few South Carolina women and men teaching the negroes in parochial schools and preaching to them as their beloved teachers and pastors. In my adopted State, which I love more and more as the days go by, I do not know a single case of a native white woman teaching negro children, though there are not a few of our men who preach to them.

In this great Mississippi valley, teeming with negroes, we need the help of our white people. If I were able to establish what I consider the ideal school to meet our conditions in the valley of this great river, this is what I would have. A rural industrial plant, with perhaps a clergyman of practical abilities, or certainly a devoutly religious layman, at its head; with the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, as necessary parts of the curriculum, just as necessary as spelling or plowing; with morality as the foundation of everything; an institution segregated from town temptation, where discipline could be firmly, rigidly and kindly enforced; where the arts of nature could be taught and God in His

nature studied, known and loved; where the race would be taught that race integrity is obedience to God's own creation and appointment, and race intercourse, kindly and cordial, is not race equality; that indeed "race equality," the very expression, is an anachronism belonging to a mediæval period of Reconstruction history, which is gone long ago to its reckoning; that there is no use of such expressions as race equality as between white and black any more than between white and yellow. They are simply two races living in the same territory and trying to be as helpful to one another as possible and trying to work out God's great problem as best they can. The races of men are equally the great God's children, and their destiny is in His hands. The purpose of race distinction is known only to Him. Much, no doubt, can be learned of His purpose through the research of consecrated Christian men of scientific mind working in union, and above all, working in true scientific spirit to discover God's purpose for His creation. No other spirit will reveal the truth concerning this great question.

You have, of course, recognized that I have not attempted a scientific discussion, but have rather avoided it. I have had but one purpose in mind. I am speaking for the most part to teachers who have a ministry in life as clearly defined as my own, and shall I not add a most sacred ministry: as preacher, teacher, minister, I solemnly call you, my brothers, to attention to a great problem, to its vital interest to the world, to your part in its solution. Its deeper study can only be made by the specialist. Generalizations about it are generally erroneous and often harmful. I venture to hope that year by year the popular discussion of the subject may not be abandoned, but that special and scientific study may be made of the race issue in all its bearings.

THEODORE DUBOSE BRATTON.

Jackson, Mississippi.